

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

February 11, 2005

The Week Ahead

Wed., Feb. 16-Thu., Feb. 17 –The Commissioner attends the annual Commissioner's Retreat at Fall Creek Falls State Park.

DCS Employee Involved in Serious Accident

Submitted By Tom Riss, Regional Administrator, Davidson County

Dear Staff:

On Monday night, we had one of our staff members involved in a tragic accident. Erica Kirkwood was involved in a one-car wreck while transporting a child named Justin Heartley to Magnolia Shelter. Her state car hydroplaned on I-65 near Saturn Pkwy and went off the road, hitting a tree on the driver's side. According to the State Highway Patrol, neither Erica nor the child were wearing seatbelts, but they did not feel that speed was a factor. Apparently the accident occurred at a spot that is common for such incidents when it rains.

Erica has some serious injuries and had surgery, during which her spleen was removed. She also had a collapsed lung, broken leg and head injuries.

Justin had facial injuries, a closed right eye and lacerations to his right hand. He was doing much better, and I believe was released from the hospital to his mother early Tuesday morning.

Please keep both Erica and Justin and their families in your thoughts and prayers. We will send out updates as we get them. The Commissioner has offered to send counselors here to the office through EAP for any of you that would like to talk.

This tragic case emphasizes two important points: 1) Please make sure you wear your seatbelt at all times, and that the children we transport do the same; 2) Please make sure that we have an updated emergency contact phone number in your personnel file today. We had a hard time trying to notify Erica's family in Memphis because we did not have a contact number in her file.

This is often a dangerous job, and I am concerned for the safety of all of you while you are out there serving the public. Please take care of yourselves and your co-workers, and keep Erica in your prayers.

If you are interested in sending flowers, letters or cards, please send them to Vanderbilt University Medical Center's Division of Trauma and Surgical Critical Care, c/o Erica Kirkwood.

Tennessee Seat Belt and Child Restraint Laws

State law requires wearing a seatbelt and properly restraining children in vehicles.

For more information on seat belt usage and statewide statistics, click here:

<http://www.tdot.state.tn.us/ClickItorTicket/seatbeltn.htm>.

For more information on child safety restraints, click here:

<http://www.state.tn.us/safety/newCRD.htm>

Building Families – One Child at a Time: Special Recognition

Submitted by Judy Cole, Executive Director, Office of Regional Support

Now that the adoption blitz – Building Families – One Child at a Time – is over, I would like to extend some special recognition to Shelby County. Even though Shelby County did not reach their goal of 90 adoptions, they did an outstanding piece of work. They partnered with their private providers and completed 87 adoptions! Shelby County set the most ambitious goal of 90 adoptions. This accounted for 73 percent of the children they have in full guardianship. This was the highest percentage of any region - and they almost made it! Think about the impact this work has had on the lives of so many of their children and the families they built. The staff of Shelby County pulled together, rolled up their sleeves and, with their private providers, they took on this challenge and accomplished this amazing feat. It was a true effort in partnering and collaboration – a feat worth praising. Shelby County deserves to be very proud of their effort. In shooting for the stars they deserve special praise. Congratulations on a job well done and celebrate with them this great success at Building Families – One Child at a Time!

Celebrating Successes

Submitted by Debra Valentine, DCS Inspector General

My pastor on more than one occasion has said to the congregation, “It is a mighty poor dog, who won’t wag his own tail!” For those of you who have not had the opportunity to embrace such ultra-rural terminology, you may question the meaning. It is actually a statement of encouragement to celebrate your successes. Should one wait for others to offer recognition for your accomplishments, you may not survive the wait. Celebrating successes is not to be construed as being boastful, conceited or self-centered. Alternatively, it is the culmination of self-evaluation for which you make a passing score. Whether the test was easy or stressful, you learned valuable lessons during the process that will shape your actions for the remainder of your life. No one else can or should be expected to appreciate this as you would.

The Office of Inspector General’s Special Investigations Unit embraced the opportunity to celebrate successes last week in our first retreat at Henry Horton State Park. Our director, team coordinators, team leaders and case managers enjoyed informative presentations, shared experiences and networking support, received individual recognition and set goals for improvement. Most important was the recognition of the hard work they expended to close numerous overdue cases in a relatively short yet stressful period of time. They left the retreat not boasting, but with earnest intent to use the skills learned from this experience to our Child Protective Services partners in their efforts to reduce case sizes as well.

Providing support to all facets of DCS is the function of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG). Thanks to the vision of Commissioner Viola P. Miller, our division is new to DCS and the first of its kind in Tennessee state government. In addition to the Special Investigations, our division includes Internal Affairs, Child Placement Licensure, Internal Audit, American Correctional Association Audit Coordination and Provider Accountability Review functions. Our units are located statewide and stand ready to provide assistance and support to DCS, our providers and other state and local government entities as applicable.

The OIG units request inclusion in regional CQI, training and planning events. Our staffs have a diversity of education and life experiences that may enhance program planning. Most of them have advanced academic degrees, technical certifications, and are educators; many have years of legal, law enforcement, social work and child care experience. Most of all, we are a learning organization consistently evaluating our performance. Our desire is to continuously improve our supportive efforts to the department and celebrate a few successes along the way.

Cross-Functional Teams

Submitted by Suzanne White, Executive Administrative Assistant, Child Placement & Private Providers

Innovation is the source of sustainable best practice and efficiency for all organizations that depends on the individual and collective expertise of employees and partners. In this new era of systemic innovation, it is more important for organizations to be cross-functionally excellent rather than functionally excellent. In addition to formal and targeted planning, best-practice organizations use crosscutting initiatives on major issues in order to challenge assumptions and open up the organization to novel and creative ideas.

Managing continuous and organization-wide change requires establishing and maintaining institutional excellence, and driving systemic innovation processes continuous improvement practices. The cross-functional teams provide the mechanism by which these ideals are achieved and maintained within DCS. Thus, the cross-functional team concept is both a philosophy and a process that should become an intrinsic part of our day-to-day operations.

The purpose of the cross-functional teams is to provide a mechanism through which a diverse pool of employees and partners are able to channel their creative and innovative ideas into identifying, solving and implementing systemic changes throughout the department. Individuals from different divisions, within DCS, and DCS partners will each bring to the table a rich and diverse knowledge, heritage and expertise to draw upon in solving and improving child welfare best practices. Perspectives based on such knowledge cannot be obtained any other way except through interaction with key stakeholders. This is a continuous and enduring attitude towards, and the guiding principles for problem-solving and implementing processes within each facet of DCS.

One of the most critical components essential to the cross-functional team is information. Information is the oil that is required to make this process work effectively and efficiently; hence the diversity of expertise and knowledge required within each team. Without sharing information and collaborating as honest partners this process will not bring about sustainable change. A commitment to sharing knowledge and information, communicating openly and honestly, treating each team member with respect are critical components of this paradigm.

Proof That We Are On the Right Path: Training and Support

Submitted by Valerie J. Handy, Program Manager, Training Division

Recently I was talking to a friend who asked me what I was reading these days. Knowing that she expected me to say something related to noted motivational speaker Zig Zigler or the late Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, I smiled as I told her that I was reading “The Path to Excellence.” “Hmmm, don’t believe I know that one ... who wrote it?” she asked. Of course, I was being facetious, but when I stop to think about it, I do find myself reading and reviewing this document over and over again. I have also found myself reading and referencing a study conducted by the Washington, D.C.-based United States General Accounting Office (GAO) dated March 2003. This eye-opening study takes a look at the

strengths and weaknesses of several child welfare agencies across the nation and makes suggestions for improvement. Most notable is the fact that it goes hand in hand in what we here in Tennessee are trying to achieve in The Path to Excellence.

The study, titled “Child Welfare: HHS Could Play a Greater Role in Helping Child Welfare Agencies Recruit and Retain Staff,” points out that “high turnover rates and staffing shortages leave remaining staff with insufficient time to establish relationships with children and families and make the necessary decisions to ensure safe and stable permanent placements.” This comes as no surprise to us here in Tennessee. Another notable reference is that “large caseloads and worker turnover delay the timeliness of investigations and limit the frequency of worker visits with children, hampering agencies attainment of some key federal safety and permanency outcomes.” Again, this is no surprise. The big question becomes, “Why do new trainees leave child welfare agencies?” The answer may or may not surprise you. It was found that “about half of new workers leave because they feel they are not sufficiently trained and supported to do their jobs.” In other words, they don’t feel they get the support they need from supervisors, and training does not meet their needs. The study points out something that we all know to be true. “Child welfare workers, assisted by their supervisors, are at the core of the child welfare system.”

There is hope, however, in what initially looks pretty dismal. The study cites several state child and family welfare agencies that had experienced these same woes, but were successful in improving recruitment and retention. Their successful strategies included university training partnerships, accreditation, leadership and mentoring programs, competency-based interviews and recruitment bonuses. These are all elements of what is currently being done within the Tennessee Department of Children’s Services. We should all be encouraged. We are on the right track. If other states can do it, so can Tennessee. The Path to Excellence will take us there.

Continuous Quality Improvement: Skills Training

Submitted by Karen Davenport, Statistical Analyst, CQI Division

In the spirit of Continuous Quality Improvement, we should all be aware of the available opportunities to enrich our computer skills. This further education serves not only us, but our CQI teams as well. We are a data-driven organization and, as such, the need for the skills necessary for using that data has never been greater.

Training is available online through the Office of Information Resources for the following:

- Internet Explorer 6.0
- Microsoft Word 2000, 2002, 2003
- Microsoft Excel 2000, 2002, 2003
- Novel GroupWise 5.5 User Fundamentals

- Microsoft Access 2000, 2003

To take advantage of these courses, please do the following.

1. Contact your training coordinator.
2. Know that a cost of \$50 per packet that will be charged to the employee's cost center.
3. Once you finish each course, you will need to print out the certificate and give it to your supervisor to put in your file and get credit for your training hours.

Additionally, there are many Web sites that offer training on these programs. Even if you've had training, you can always glean a little more information from each site you access! Each site has levels of training from beginner to expert. Some recommended Web sites are:

<http://www.tutorialbox.com/tutors/off2000/>

Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Access

<http://www.learnthat.com/courses/computer/windows/>

Keyboard functions in Windows

How to Find Files on Your Computer

Understanding the Windows Folder System

<http://www.atomiclearning.com/windows>

Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Access

Core Leadership

CORE Leadership Meeting Mary Beth Franklyn, Presiding February 11, 2005

Commissioner Update

The Commissioner, Marge Gildner and the on-the-job (OJT) coaches provided an overview of the training program to the regional administrators (RAs) during last week's RA meeting. Valerie Handy discussed the General Accounting Office (GAO) report on child welfare staffing issues. She linked their recommendations to what we are doing in the Practice Model and Path to Excellence

The first of three provider meetings began on February 7 and had an attendance of more than 100 people. The Commissioner felt we made a very important step in that providers know they can no longer work without the family. Providers are currently using behavior control and compliance for children. We need to move to self-control and personal

responsibility for children. We need to work on getting our children out of custody. Judy Cole will be working with regions on this issue.

Commissioner asked Core Leadership Team (CLT) staff members to identify accomplishments in their respective areas. Members' thoughts included the following:

Elizabeth Black – Regional Implementation Planning Process

Beth Kasch – Progress in Central Intake

Judy Cole – Rollout of Cross Functional Team (Shelby)

Tom Riche – Progress of the Training Consortium

Michael Price – New Model for Rollout of releases

Diligent Recruitment

All regions are required to have a diligent recruitment plan. Elizabeth Black stated that Shelby County was an example of a good plan.

<u>Lead Writers</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Due date</u>
Suzanne White	Davidson	2/16/05
Sandra Wilson	Mid Cumberland	3/11/05
Frank Mix	Shelby	2/16/05
Clay Crook	Southwest	2/16/05
Frank Mix	Northwest	negotiating
Frank Mix	South Central	2/16/05
Shalonda Cawthon	Upper Cumberland	2/16/05
Randal Lea	Southeast	negotiating
Kent Berkley	Hamilton	2/16/05
Mattie Satterfield	East	negotiating
Michelle	Knox	negotiating
Elizabeth Black	Northeast	2/16/05

Office of Information Systems (OIS)

Judy Cole will send a note to regional administrators, telling them to notify Michael Price when weekend data cleanups are scheduled. Price met with Andy Shookoff last week and will draft a self-assessment of his division comparing where the agency is currently compared to last year. The project prioritization will be reviewed next week with CLT. OIS lost some internal staffing resources and have spent an enormous amount of time on E-Biz and needs to re-access their division before looking at project prioritization.

Laptops for Adoption Specialists

Bonnie Hommrich and the executive directors will be working on this issue.

Legislation: Permanent Guardianship

Summary of proposed legislation has been submitted to Governor's office, but a formal bill has not been submitted yet. Another permanency option allows the court to appoint a permanent guardian without termination of parental rights (TPR), but it does limit parental rights. This is a good option for families who don't want to TPR. Permanent guardianship would take away planned permanency living arrangement (PPLA) as an acceptable permanency goal. The Commissioner does not feel PPLA is permanency, and we should not have PPLA or non-relative, either, as a goal. If we have permanent guardianship as an option, we hope this helps us take fewer kids into custody. Frank Mix is working with Cornerstone and the Commissioner on video regarding permanency options.

Employee Overtime Report

The percentage of overtime dropped 2 percent, but we need to reduce it by an additional 33 percent. Reductions have occurred everywhere with the exception of Central Office and Knox County. Assuming regions have adequate number of positions then overtime hours should never exceed the number of vacancies.

Complaints

Tammy Feldman is now the Director of the Ombudsman's office. They will be using a Web-based system for tracking complaints. Anytime you receive an e-mail complaint and you are copied, please notify Donna Cherry in the Ombudsman's office before initiating a response. The Commissioner suggested that her e-mail should be accessible to Feldman.



The secret of joy in work is contained in one word – excellence. To know how to do something well is to enjoy it. – Pearl Buck

